

# **The Marks of a Servant**

## **Can you see these four qualities in your life?**

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IN 1863, ABRAHAM Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that every man was free. Thousands of slaves gained that freedom at the end of the Civil War. With this freedom came a choice as to how they would live: as servants, or as free men.

History records another declaration of freedom that presented slaves with the choice of how they would use their freedom. In Gal. 5:13, Paul declares, "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love."

Through His death on the cross, Jesus Christ bought us out of the slave market of sin and set us free. As free men, we now have the choice as to how we will live. Paul exhorts us to use our freedom, not to pursue our own selfish interests, but to serve one another. Albert Schweitzer echoed the call when he said, "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know; the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."

But what does it mean to be a servant? The Bible paints a picture of certain qualities that should characterize our lives as we give ourselves to others. These are the marks of a true servant.

### **LOVE FOR THE MASTER**

After giving Moses the Ten Commandments, God also gave him a body of ordinances, some concerning slaves and their freedom.

If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything. . . . But if the servant declares, "I love my master . . . and do not want to go free," then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life.

—Ex. 21:2–6

The servant's decision to give his life to his master was not based on his living conditions, his rate of pay, his benefits, paid holidays, or perks. He chose to remain a servant because he loved his master. Today, as well, the true servant is one who is motivated by love for the master.

A brilliant, talented young concert pianist was giving the first concert of his professional career. As he played skillfully through his program, the audience sat in rapt attention, hardly able to take their eyes off the young musician. At the conclusion of his performance, the audience exploded into a standing ovation. All were on their feet, except for one old man at the front. But the young pianist went off the stage crestfallen and dejected.

Afterward, the stage manager came up to him full of congratulations and praise, but the young pianist said, "I was no good, it was a failure." The manager responded, "You didn't fail! It was tremendous! Look out there, everyone is on his feet except one old man!" And the young pianist responded, "Yes, but that one old man is my teacher."

Our service is not to be motivated by the applause of the crowd. It is to be motivated by our love for the master. When we are asked to serve, to teach the fifth-grade boys, to visit the sick, or to clean up after a party, we should not ask about the rate of pay or who will pat us on the back. We should say "Yes," simply because we love Jesus Christ.

What the world needs today is not more Ph.D.s, not more bricklayers, not more doctors, lawyers, or even pastors. Instead, what the world needs is more people who are willing to commit their lives to be servants. These people are not motivated by power, prestige, or pay. They are motivated by their love for their Master, and they have committed their lives to serving Him.

## **JOY IN SERVICE**

In Ps. 40:6–8 (NASB), David writes,

Sacrifice and meal offering Thou hast not desired;

My ears Thou hast opened;

Burnt offering and sin offering Thou hast not required.

Then I said, "Behold, I come;

In the scroll of the book it is written of me;

I delight to do Thy will, O my God;

Thy Law is within my heart."

True servants are those whose lives are characterized by a joyful attitude and conduct. They respond as David did, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God." The word for *delight* carries the idea of eagerness, or taking pleasure in something. A servant is one who does his task with joy and eagerness.

Servants can respond this way because they have studied God's Word. The phrase in v. 6, "My ears Thou hast opened," has a double meaning. It probably refers to Exodus 21 and the voluntary slave whose ear was pierced. But it also suggests the idea of the person's ear being opened so that he can understand and obey God's Word. It's significant that David says in v. 8, "Thy Law is within my heart," immediately after he states his willingness to serve. A servant is one who studies God's Word, reads the commands of Scripture, and then willingly obeys. He delights in obeying his Master and it is from those acts of obedience that he receives his joy.

There are some things we do in life because we're committed to do them. We may complain, but we'll do them because they are important. There are other things we do because they bring us joy. I jog because I'm committed to keeping my body in shape—I don't enjoy the side-aches, the tiredness, the pain, or the sweat. On the other hand, I look forward to playing with my son because I love to see and hear him laugh. Jogging may become drudgery while playing with my son may be fun, but I do both because I know that God wants me to care for my body and my family.

A true servant finds satisfaction in every step of obedience to God. He serves because it brings him pleasure, not just because it is his duty. He doesn't complain because a task is menial or overwhelming. This doesn't necessarily mean that he enjoys every task. His joy does not come from the task itself, it comes from the act of obedience. He is eager to obey and serve.

## **AS FAITHFUL STEWARDS**

In addition to being servants who are motivated by love for the Master, and whose attitudes and actions are characterized by joy, we are to be faithful and trustworthy. In 1 Cor. 4:1–2 (NASB), Paul states, "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy."

A steward was the overseer of an estate. He had a responsibility for which he was accountable. To the master he was a slave; to the slaves he was an overseer. The nature of the work meant that he wasn't closely supervised, so it was essential for him to be trustworthy.

Joseph was this kind of a servant when he was a prisoner in Egypt. Potiphar entrusted everything in his house to him. Later, the jailer entrusted the jail to him. Finally, Pharaoh entrusted all of Egypt to him.

As stewards, we are to be faithful and trustworthy. Faithfulness can be demonstrated in many ways. When I was a sophomore in college, I was asked to substitute teach one week in our college Sunday school class. All week long, I neglected to prepare. When Sunday finally came, I played a tape on prayer by a well-known speaker. I felt guilty and depressed because I did not fulfill my responsibility. Through my actions, I had demonstrated that I was not faithful.

In contrast is the Roman sentinel who guarded the city of Pompeii. When the city was destroyed by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, many people were buried in the ruins. Some were found in deep vaults, fleeing in vain from the encroaching destruction. Others were found hiding in lofty chambers. But the Roman sentinel was found at the city gate where he had been placed by the captain, his hands still grasping his weapon. While the earth shook beneath him, while the floods of ashes and cinders overwhelmed him, he stood at his post; and it was there that he was found a thousand years later.

If you volunteer to serve in the Sunday school program, you will not be expected to stand still and be buried by volcanic ash—or by active five-year-olds. But you will be expected to be trustworthy and faithful. You will be expected to prepare and to be ready to carry out your assignment. If you join an evangelism team, you will be expected to do the homework and to be prepared to go out each week and share the gospel. If you volunteer to take someone shopping or to pick someone up at the airport, you will be expected to be on time. You must be trustworthy so that someone does not have to be looking over your shoulder constantly.

## **A LOW PROFILE**

A servant is characterized by a love for his Master. He does not complain about his task but rather serves with joy. He is trustworthy and he makes himself accountable to others. In addition, a servant is one who is humble, willing to accept a lower position so that he might better meet the needs of others. In Mt. 20:25–28, Christ states,

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

It has been said about our society and about the Church in general that we have too many chiefs and not enough Indians, too many generals and not enough privates. Evidently, the same problem existed in Jesus' time. People wanted positions of authority where they could exercise power. They wanted to be recognized as being important. Jesus countered this tendency by instructing His disciples to be servants. They were not to follow the culture of the day, but they were to serve one another. Jesus Himself did not come to be served, but to serve. The ultimate example of service was that He gave His life for us.

Someone asked the conductor of a great symphony orchestra which instrument he considered the most difficult to play. The conductor thought a moment and then said, "Second fiddle. I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find one who can play second fiddle with enthusiasm—that's a problem."

A servant is one who accepts a position, task, or role that allows him to meet the needs of other people. A true servant must be willing to accept a position that others may consider to be beneath them.

These kinds of servants are the ones who work in the nursery or teach Sunday school. They cook the food for a high school banquet or provide transportation for the elderly. They disciple new believers, set up the coffee or sound system, or put away chairs. They pick up after their children, make copies for a coworker, or help their neighbor mow the lawn. They are willing to accept any task, no matter how lowly, if it is an opportunity to minister to others.

Part of the difficulty in becoming a servant comes from the fact that someone else may get the credit that we feel we deserve. We want to be recognized and considered important. We need to remember the sign that read, "There is no limit to the good that a man can do, if he doesn't care who gets the credit."

Another reason why this aspect of servanthood is difficult for us is that we live in a society that measures success by power and prestige. People dress for success, wear power ties, join the right health club, maintain the proper address, and drive the right car. These kinds of people are considered to have leadership potential. But the ones who want to be great in God's Kingdom are those who serve and meet the needs of people. D.L. Moody once said, "The measure of a man is not how many servants he has, but how many men he serves."

Christ's death on the cross set us free. No longer must we struggle in vain to win approval from God by how we live our lives. We can use that freedom to pursue our own pleasure, or we can surrender our freedom to God, committing our lives to His service. As we surrender to Him, people will see clearly the marks of a servant in our lives: love for the Master, an attitude of joy, faithfulness, and trustworthiness, and a willingness to accept a lowly position in order to better meet the needs of others.

When people look at you, what do they see?